

The Despotica (Part III: Xim at Vontor)

By Michael Kogge; Illustrations by Cat Staggs

PESHOSLOC

-15,762 to -15,609 BBY



Ten thousand years and a couple thousand volumes in *The Despotica* separate Lyechusas from Peshosloc, the holowright who launched Xim into his next echelon of infamy. For before Xim found the pen of Peshosloc, he was primarily a creature of the stage, a tragic role the greatest of actors played to wealthy audiences in nectar festivals. But after Peshosloc's 90-odd holoplays, Xim erupted into a galactic phenomenon, known to rich and poor alike as the devastator of civilizations, the most Heinous Being in Recorded Time, the eyes of Evil itself, or simply, "the Despot."

Peshosloc strayed from the path Lyechusas had blazed, deciding to drop all pretense of poetic diction and instead entrance viewers with the most vivid--and lurid--of spectacles. Xim became his vessel to showcase those extraordinary events common beings did not witness in their daily lives: epic space battles, exploding moons, wars in seven solar systems, even mass spacings of entire populations. Despite his taste for ostentation and the grotesque, critics hailed Peshosloc's scripts as more than just bang-and-boom. Where others had tried and failed, Peshosloc succeeded in "blowing up" *The Despotica* for popular consumption because he never wrote down to his audience. Throughout dazzling detonations and sordid villainy, he wove simple tragedies of the heart, the very foundation of good space opera. Xim's madness had motivation: passion and betrayal, those most ordinary of emotions, drove Xim to the heights of brutality.

Success breeds detractors, particularly in academia. Held in highest contention is Peshosloc's contract, fiercely defended by his estate, which stipulates that every holo shot from his scripts be subtitled "based on a true story," regardless whether or not it is all his invention. This has led many non-discerning spectators to believe that they are watching history as it had actually unfolded. Even schoolteachers show Peshosloc's holos in lieu of having their classes study the original sources. When the Proponents for a Standard Revised Galactic Continuity complained to Republic censors that Peshosloc was perverting truth for pure entertainment, the holowright quipped, "what the Despot did, done have we all."

One truth is certain: of all the writers collected in *The Despotica*, none have come close to beating Peshosloc at the box office. And it is likely to stay that way in the foreseeable future. New holos made from Peshosloc's scripts continue to break records as every generation of directors strive to prove their mettle and trump the award-winning spectacles of the past.

XIM AT VONTOR

(EXCERPTS)

BY PESHOSLOC

(MODERNIZED FROM THE MID-GALACTIC STANDARD)

MAIN PLAYERS

XIM, the Despot

INDREXU, his consort

JAMINERE, general of Xim's ground forces

OZIAF, T'iin-T'iin tinkerer

CORPS COMMANDER, lead war-robot

KELDRATH, admiral in Xim's starfleet

ROBEIR II, DUKE OF CRON
LORD TION, head of House of Tion

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE.

TRIPLE MOONS part their celestial junction to reveal the GIANT PLANET they orbit...

TITLE: Vontor System, Si'Klaata Cluster.

...while their lunar images appear in double, REFLECTIONS that ripple across the planet's kiirium-laced surface.

Often mistaken for a much-hypothesized "white hole," the world of VONTOR would seem a virtual mirror in space if not for the other ORBITAL DANCE it hosts.

And what a dance it is. FROM AFAR it looks like a swarm of fire-zips whipped up in the frenzy of mating season, blinking and belching their lovely flames.

On CLOSER inspection, those flames do more than excite the intended partner.

HEATBEAMS lance out from inorganic, metallic fliers. EXPLOSIONS blossom and rage once again in Vontor's mirror.

This is a ballet of war, engaged by the largest STARFLEETS ever assembled in holos or history.

A million ships. Heavy and light, of every model and class. Hutt war-yachts. Livien cutters. Thanium star-glaives. Cronian battlebirds. Spinning and sparring with each other in murderous minuets of their own.

And in the CENTER of the dance, alone and still, drifts its choreographer, the *DEATHKNELL*.

Argai's massive floating fortress has no double in Vontor's blaze; instead the vessel makes REFLECTIONS of its own, bouncing offending lasers to snuff out their offending sources.

For kiirium itself alloys the *Deathknell*'s steel and shows the fight from all angles...in honeycombed engine housing and narrow conduit trenches...in the shielding of weapon batteries and the spires of command centers.

But near one PARAPET there is a void in the reflections, a gap where lommite glass replaces kiirium steel to allow for a WINDOW into *Deathknell*'s heart...where TWO FIGURES stand.

INT. COMMAND BRIDGE. *DEATHKNELL*.

XIM THE DESPOT, hands folded behind a scarlet shimmercape, gazes out the viewport. He is calm, almost serene, as fireballs engulf the starfield.

XIM

The buccaneers of Corlass like to say that thrice the sacking sifts out all the spoils.

Beside him is his trophy, INDREXU, her long black hair framing a face for which the galaxy has no equal.

XIM

Today my boot will squash these worms once and for all, and then I will have all the kiirium I need--

A burst of STATIC truncates his gloating. It emanates from one of the many ROBOTIC AUTOMATONS which crew the stations.

XIM

That damn racket will be my bane! If my dwarf doesn't squelch it soon, his pelt will make you a warm coat.

Indrexu says not a word.

JAMINERE (OS)

Overlord...

XIM

Has he isolated the source?

JAMINERE (OS)

No, sir.

Crisp and handsome in his olive-green general's uniform, FASOL JAMINERE stands behind the command podium, the only other human on the bridge.

JAMINERE

But Admiral Keldrath reports the last jump-gate has been taken.

XIM

Already? Can Keldrath not allow me more than a moment to revel in the beauty we have wrought?

JAMINERE

Unless you desire the Hutts to retreat--

XIM

No. Kossak will not be able to wriggle out this time. Discharge the pulse cannons.

INDREXU

At this close range?

XIM

You have a concern, my dear?

Indrexu casts a worried glance at Jaminere.

JAMINERE

Overlord, a discharge could cause massive collateral damage among our forces, especially among the Thanium fleet--

XIM

Of which I am unconcerned. Thanios's men know there is no greater sacrifice than to give their lives to the glory of my legend.

Both Indrexu and Jaminere turn pale.

XIM

You may fire when ready.

EXT. DEATHKNELL. SPACE.

A series of PULSATING ENERGY RINGS crackle and expand around the bow of the ship, then spiral toward the most crowded arena of battle--

Space itself seems to SHUDDER as the pulse-rings soar through the emptiness, then BRIGHTENS when they encircle hulls and overheat engine cores.

INT. COMMAND BRIDGE. DEATHKNELL.

The viewport turns a BURNING WHITE and the Despot smiles.

XIM

What think you now, my Queen, of the Third Battle of Vontor?

INDREXU

May it be the last.

XIM (chuckles)

Indeed.

She walks towards the lift.

INT. CORRIDOR. DEATHKNELL.

At attention along the wall, black-steeled WAR-ROBOTS move to follow Indrexu. Jaminere rushes out from the bridge.

JAMINERE (OS)

Spare a moment, Your Highness?

INDREXU

Don't call me that.

The CORPS COMMANDER breaks from the war-robot guard to block Jaminere. The bone-white DEATH'S HEAD stamped on its chest is poised eye-level with the general.

JAMINERE

Machine, what are you doing? Stand down!

STATIC hisses from the Corps Commander's speaker grille.

CORPS COMMANDER

The Master---zzzt---has ordered the---zzzt-- maintenance of a security perimeter--- zzzrttt-- around his consort.

JAMINERE

I am the general of Xim's forces! You stand down when I say or I will have you gutted for a galley appliance.

The Corps Commander raises its weapon arm, a gesture mimicked by the other war-robots.

JAMINERE

Fine. Forget I asked. I was merely trying to salvage the operation--

INDREXU

Salvage? You let Thanios die.

Indrexu glares at him through the steel arms.

JAMINERE

I had no choice. If I argued any further, he would have executed me on the spot.

INDREXU

That can still be arranged. Corps Commander?

Jaminere begins to backpedal.

CORPS COMMANDER

Interference momentarily dampening sound reception. Please hold---zzzt--Mistress.

INDREXU

To think that it is but static that comes between us.

JAMINERE

You don't have to do this. You'd be no better than him.

INDREXU

That's where you have it wrong. I am better than--

The SUSTAINED JOLT OF STATIC forces Indrexu and Jaminere to cover their ears. Two of the robots rotate their cannons in erratic fashion; another bumps again and again into the wall. When the noise finally ends...

INDREXU

Are you trying to deafen me?

CORPS COMMANDER

Acoustic channel switched. Repeat--zzzt-- command, Mistress.

INDREXU

March to that repair room and find the rodent! Get him to deactivate those horrid audiocomms at once!

CORPS COMMANDER

Instruction will----brrzzzzt---dissolve the security perimeter.

INDREXU

What security? You are malfunctioning! And as the Overlord's consort, I cannot have defective mechanicals trying to protect me.

CORPS COMMANDER

Command--zzzt---approved, Mistress.

The Corps Commander's cranial turret parades a rainbow of lights, then all the guards turn and stomp down an adjacent hallway...except one, continuing to walk into the wall, caught in a recursive loop.

JAMINERE

Brainless bullethead.

Jaminere presses the shutdown button under its cranial turret, then breathes relief.

INT. GENERAL'S QUARTERS. DEATHKNELL.

The T'iin-T'iin engineer OZIAF sits on the floor and pulls out a tangle of electronic components from behind the desk.

OZIAF

Interference, interference, where do you buzz?

He starts nibbling on wire housing to open it.

OZIAF

Can't have my children or my master suffer your noise anymore.

His ears prick up. Muffled voices, just outside the doors. Oziaf grabs the components and ducks.

The doors whisk open. Indrexu and Jaminere enter.

Indrexu heads to the viewport and looks out at the dying battle. Oziaf trembles, squeezed beneath the desk.

JAMINERE

Thanios would have done the same if he was in my position.

INDREXU

You are all cowards.

JAMINERE

Listen. We must deal with the Hutts first. Get one enemy out of the way--

INDREXU

Jaminere, if you are unwilling to do the deed, I know others have expressed interest. Keldrath, for instance...

JAMINERE

Do you truly want his grubby hands all over you?

INDREXU

How little you men comprehend. Why should I care if it is Thanios, Keldrath...or you? Her eyebrow arches.

INDREXU

That is, if you can afford my price.

The COMM-CHIME startles them. A red bulb lights up on the desk's console.

XIM (over intercom)

General Jaminere... General?

Jaminere bends over his desk to speak into the intercom.

Below, Oziaf grips his knees to his chest.

JAMINERE

Yes, Overlord?

XIM(over intercom)

I want you to welcome your fellow commanders in the hangar bay. Inform them they must substitute their uniforms and side-arms for the finest garb in their wardrobes. A grand feast is being prepared to celebrate my victory.

JAMINERE

So soon?

XIM (over intercom)

Let us just say that the collateral damage was more than sufficient.

JAMINERE

I will be there at once, overlord.

The intercom cuts out.

INDREXU

Did he hear us?

JAMINERE

Doubtful. The jammer Lord Tion provided will have clouded our conversation.

INDREXU

Is that what's causing all the interference?

JAMINERE

A necessary annoyance.

She slaps him in the face.

INDREXU

You bungling jackleg--you risk exposing the whole operation!

JAMINERE

Do you know of any other way to communicate with the others?
Indrexu huffs, stalks to the doors.

JAMINERE

Wait--

INDREXU

Fail me again, and the price will be your life.
She storms out. The general rubs his cheek.
UNDER THE DESK
Oziaf scratches his fur, twitching uncontrollably.
INT. HANGAR. DEATHKNELL.
Attired in their best, ADMIRAL KELDRATH, LORD TION, and ROBEIR II, DUKE OF CRON, disembark from an escort shuttle. Jaminere waits at the end of the egress ramp.

JAMINERE

The overlord is pleased. You have given him the victory he's long desired.

KELDRATH

The pleasure is all ours. Will Queen Indrexu attend the feast?

JAMINERE

I'd keep my hands in my lap if I were you, Admiral.
INT. CORRIDOR. DEATHKNELL.
War-robots guard every bulkhead they pass.

TION

I see the overlord has taken to our new models.

JAMINERE

Very much. Saving our T'iin-T'iin engineer, Her Highness, and yours truly, the crew of the Deathknell is entirely automaton.

CRON

The overlord does not like to employ flesh- and-bloods?

JAMINERE

After the disaster of the first battle, he prefers the reliability of his robots.

KELDRATH

And what about you?

JAMINERE

I...appreciate their efficiency.

CRON

How so?

JAMINERE

They do precisely as instructed, though their acoustic sensors have a tendency to pick up outside interference.

TION

Do they? It must have been a flaw in the T'iin-T'iin's original design. I will have my engineers re-check the components, but a remote reset may do the trick.

Tion adjusts the circuit-laden CONTROL BELT he wears.

TION

Still, I hope it hasn't provoked any major hassles.

JAMINERE

Only a slap in the face.

CRON

Those 'bots must make wonderful soldiers. You can send 'em to their doom without complaint. A shame we won't see them in action on Vontor.

KELDRATH

I wouldn't rest my crown so fast, Cron. You may yet get your wish. I have heard rumors the Hutts have raised another army, in secret.

The others slow.

TION

Another army?

CRON

Pah. The Hutts are done.

JAMINERE

If they had one, why haven't they used it?

KELDRATH (shrugs)

I don't know...

Keldrath lays a meaty grip on Jaminere's shoulder.

KELDRATH

...perhaps they are searching for better leaders.

Jaminere hits a switch on the wall. The doors part--

INT. BANQUET HALL. DEATHKNELL.

Xim and Indrexu sit at the end of a long table laden with platters of savory meats and fruits. Xim lets go of Indrexu's hand and rises.

XIM

Gentlemen, care you for some refreshment?

Keldrath grins at the Queen.

KELDRATH

I'd like nothing better.

An apron-wearing Corps Commander pulls out chairs. Keldrath hurries to his, next to Indrexu.

KELDRATH

Your Majesty. Always an honor.

INDREXU

The honor is all mine, Admiral Keldrath.

She offers her delicate hand. Closing his eyes, Keldrath kisses it with relish.

Jaminere sits across from her. She avoids his glare.

XIM

A pity Thanios could not join us.

TION

Yes...yes...

KELDRATH

A pity.

Tense silence all around. The Corps Commander pours ale into goblets. The Duke of Cron lifts his.

CRON

If I could be so bold, Overlord, to propose the first toast. For our triumphant Xim, Conqueror of Vontor and Crusher of Slugs...

Cron looks to Tion.

TION

Whose Fist Shall Enclose the Stars... All eyes on Jaminere.

JAMINERE

...and...Whose Name Shall Outlive Time...

KELDRATH

May he and his beloved Queen reign forever.

MEN

Hear, hear.

Clinks and drinks.

KELDRATH

Nothing better than a douse of Derellium's finest after a long day's work, eh?

XIM

Particularly after all the work is done.

Xim puts down his goblet. The Corps Commander lays a NEEDLEBEAMER PISTOL on Jaminere's plate.

XIM

General Jaminere, can you do us the kind favor of finishing this long day and terminating Admiral Keldrath's service?

Keldrath coughs and spits out the ale. Jaminere blinks, stupefied.

JAMINERE

Excuse me, my lord?

XIM

Directly between those ugly eyes. So that my Queen avoids any splatter on her gown.

TION

Overlord...perhaps the brew has hit you too hard.

XIM

Actually, I would like to enjoy another round, without the former admiral's company. So if you can please expedite this, Fasol...

Jaminere glances at the gun, then at the panic-stricken Keldrath.

KELDRATH

Please, no...

JAMINERE

May I ask what he has done to deserve execution?

XIM

My GenoHaradan spies watched him hold his guns when Kossak's escape pod launched.

KELDRATH

That was his pod? I thought it housed his lackeys.

XIM

Is that your best excuse?

CRON

The admiral was probably trying to show mercy to our new serfs--

XIM

My commanders do not dole out mercy. Only I am vested with that power.

Weapons arms poke out from beneath aprons of the war-robot.

KELDRATH

I apologize, overlord. It will not happen again.

XIM

Of course it won't...once your corpse hits the floor. (to Jaminere) Time to show your loyalty, General. That your word is worth more than my engineer's.

Jaminere looks around the table. Cron edges back his chair. Tion reaches for his belt. Indrexu wipes off her dinner knife. Keldrath's eyes plead for his life.

XIM

Yes, I am aware of the jammer you installed in your quarters...so you could hide your private liaisons with my Queen.

INDREXU

What is the Daritha intimating?

Tion touches a BUTTON on his belt. Xim takes Indrexu's hand.

XIM

I intimate nothing. But I remember all. How I rescued a certain orphan from the plank...then adopted him like a son...

Jaminere picks up the needlebeamer from the plate.

XIM

...enrolled him in the highest institutes of learning...even named him my general...

Tion's belt BEEPS. Luminodes flash across the Corps Commander's cranial current.

XIM

Yet I feel he fails to appreciate what he has been given. Is he but another organic ingrate? Or has he had just a momentary lapse of oblivion?

JAMINERE

No. He remembers.

Jaminere aims the needlebeamer at Keldrath.

JAMINERE

All too well, he remembers.

Shifts it ever so slightly...

JAMINERE

How your pirates plundered his home. Ravaged his mother...

...to target Xim.

JAMINERE

Murdered his father.

XIM (chuckles)

Corps Commander, shoot this traitor.

Tion keys a code onto the belt. The Corps Commander's luminodes go dark.

CORPS COMMANDER

Cannot process command during reboot...

XIM

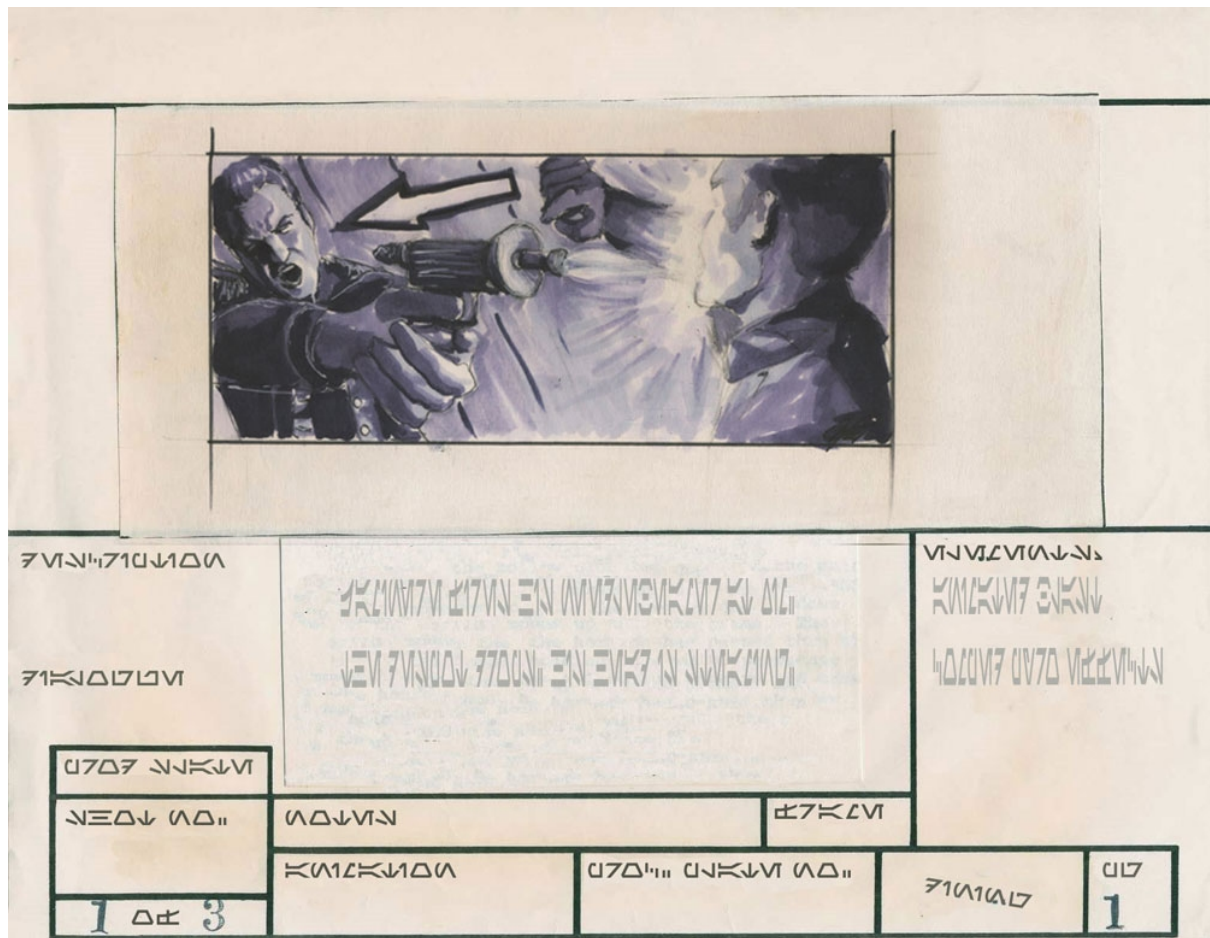
What? I never ordered--

Jaminere FIRES the needlebeamer at Xim.

The Despot drops, his head steaming.

TION

We must run! The war-bot will be online again in moments.



Cron opens the door. Keldrath is the first out.
But Jaminere stands frozen, staring at the fallen Despot.

Storyboard illustration courtesy of HoloClysm Productions

JAMINERE

What have I done?

INDREXU

What he did many years ago.

She pulls his elbow.

INDREXU

Come, else the others steal our slice of his empire.

INT. CORRIDOR. DEATHKNELL.

Oziaf whistles merrily as he drops out of a conduit.

OZIAF

Problem fixed, jammer gone, robots happy, Oziaf happy, master happy!

Moans from deeper down the corridor cuts short his tune.

Oziaf pads carefully forward...and skitters back when a SHAPE crawls around the corner.
Blood mucks the shimmercape. Blackened hair lingers in clumps. A charred half-ear oozes tympanic pus.

OZIAF

Master? Is that you?

Xim raises his head to look in Oziaf's direction. One eye blinks, the other socket exposes a GAPING WOUND.

OZIAF (gasping)

By the White Dwarf of Rinn...

INT. REPAIR ROOM. DEATHKNELL.

Xim sits on a workbench-turned-makeshift operating table. Turbo-wrenches, laser solders, and a sundry other tools hang on wall racks around him. Devices in various states of disrepair clutter the floor.

Oziaf scours through his crate of war-robot components.

OZIAF

I don't know master I don't know...

Oziaf anchors his foot on a cranial turret and yanks out a METALLIC BALL snaked in wires.

OZIAF

I didn't design these optic lenses for organic use.

XIM

Then re-design them! You're the engineer.

Oziaf tugs at his ears. He removes a soldering iron from the rack.

OZIAF

It could place my master in greater pain...

Xim growls and grabs the T'iin-T'iin by his furry neck, lifting him far above the floor.

XIM

You waste time! Even as we speak, they are regrouping.

OZIAF (panting)

Master...your loyal servant only wants... his master not to suffer anymore...

Xim's gloved hand constricts. Oziaf wheezes...

XIM

Do what I command or forever hold your squeaks.

OZIAF

Yessss...

Xim tightens his grip. Oziaf's tongue flaps, eyes bulge...his little life strangled out of him...then Xim releases and he falls, failing to land on all fours.

OZIAF

...master.

Xim lies down on the workbench.

XIM

You may proceed.

Oziaf swallows, then scampers up. Xim's one-eye stare makes him shudder.

XIM

Now!

Oziaf winces, then gingerly picks the FRAYED NERVES out from Xim's socket. He starts to solder them to the WIRES of the ball.

Sparks fly. Blood shoots. Xim grits his teeth through the entire operation.

Oziaf thumbs the ball in place. He steps back.

OZIAF

Try to engage the lens, master.

Xim sits up, kicks the clutter. His good eye blinks, and he squints with his other...the metal casing of the ball SPLITS, shutter opens--

Oziaf shields his eyes, blinded by the BRIGHT LIGHT that streams out.

XIM

So this is how they see. In the infrared. Ultraviolet. And the twenty spectrums. (optic lens rotates) I should have done this sooner.

Oziaf brushes down the patches of his frazzled fur.

OZIAF

Oziaf is happy that his master is happy...

XIM

Remove the other lens. Replace my other eye.

OZIAF

But master, it's perfectly healthy...

Xim reaches for his human eye. He starts to dig...

OZIAF

No, master, don't--

Squishes, a POP, and Xim plucks out his eye.

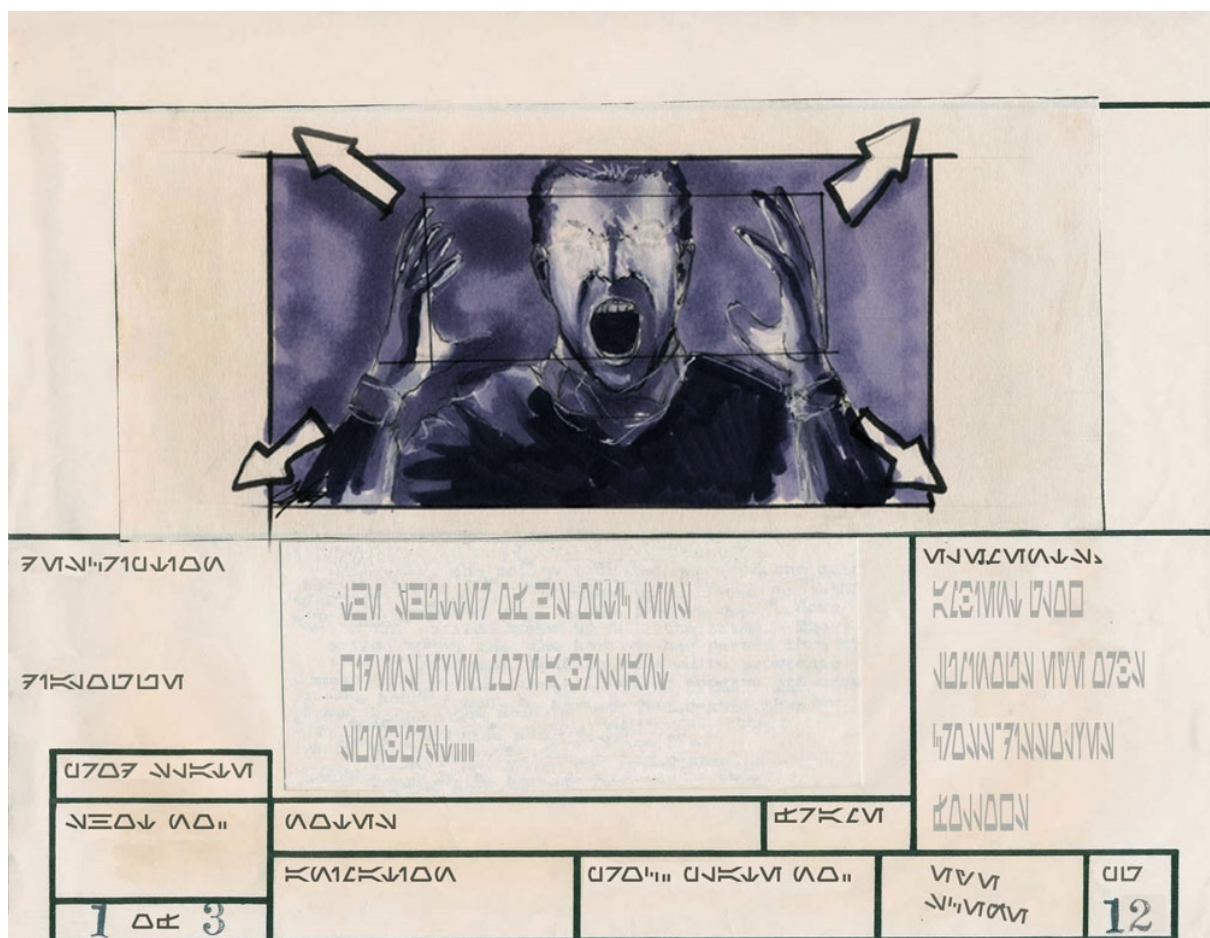
XIM

If I am to lead my war-robots in battle against those blackguards, I must see as they do.

His fist clenches. Vitreous humor SQUIRTS between his fingers.

XIM

Their world is my world now.



The shutter of his optic lens widens even more, a brilliant SUNBURST...

Storyboard illustration courtesy of HoloClysm Productions

EXT. CANYON FLOOR. DAY.

...that becomes TWINNED, blazing in both sockets of the war-robot DEATH'S HEAD INSIGNIA.

Xim's new emblem also seems to have bestowed the Corps Commander a new functionality.

The chief war-robot's oversees its lesser models haul green kiirium slabs from a DARK CAVERN into the holds of Xim's gigantic treasure carrier, QUEEN OF RANROON.

TITLE: Yelsmuth Canyons, Vontor.

Xim strides down the ramp. Oziaf hurries behind him, playing with a detector device.

XIM

Where are they? You said the traitors fled here.

OZIAF

As I keep saying, master, our mytag sensors are Tionese handiwork...

XIM

So are my eyes. And I can still make out their jet-trails in the skies.

His photoreceptors move in and out of their sockets.

XIM

The scum couldn't have just disappeared.

Xim surveys the barren tundra before him. Wind whistles through claw-shaped arches. Dust storms pepper the horizon.

XIM

At least I'll get my kiirium. Corps Commander, how goes the haul?

CORPS COMMANDER

Cavern almost depleted of value. Further exploitation requires more sophisticated equipment.

XIM

Your pulse cannons can't blast open new tunnels? I didn't pay for those them to go unused.

OZIAF

Master, it's a matter of depth, not weaponry. Their locomotors cannot handle the sheer slope of terrain down there.

XIM

What did you equipped them with, wheeltires?

OZIAF

The laser-reflective kiirium you requested weighs on their joints, master.

Xim fumes and looks over his war-robots, from their block feet to the bone-white skulls on their chest plates...to the luminodes that blink in the dark cavern.

His optic lenses suddenly FLASH--

XIM

Why yes--it is a matter of depth. Corps Commander, stop the haul. Prepare for war.

OZIAF

War?

CORPS COMMANDER

Request desired enemy, sir.

XIM

The Hutts. The traitors. Vontor itself. (turns to cave) They're down there. Deep. Using the kiirium lodes to mask their presence.

OZIAF

But, master...is that wise? The war- robots are not like your Star Lancers. They perform best on level terrain.

XIM

War is war, dwarf. If you fear its glory, begone! I will not allow those miscreants to steal my Queen and slip from my grasp again.

OZIAF

Yes, a good idea, master. I will stay put and watch over the ship...

Oziaf scurries up the ramp of the Queen of Ranroon. Xim raises his black-gloved hand in defiance.

XIM

Today My Fist Shall Enclose. Today My Name Shall Outlive any Villain who Dares Oppose Me.

One gesture from the Corps Commander and the war-robots drop their loads, make a three-point, synchronous turn to Xim.

XIM

The Third Battle of Vontor ends here. It ends now.

The army marches in step behind Xim. His shimmercape sails in the wind.

XIM

And as said my Queen, it shall be the last, indeed.

Xim laughs, despotically.

Playwright and screenwriter Michael Kogge resides in Los Angeles. WGBH-Boston commissioned his latest film, the PBS documentary ["My Best Friend for Congress"](#), for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. His essays on the films of Billy Wilder, Stanley Kubrick, and William Friedkin appear in the forthcoming *George Lucas's Blockbusting*, published by HarperCollins. He has been rumored to lurk at www.mikekogge.com.

Special thanks to Jason Fry, Daniel Wallace, Eelia Henderscheid, Matt Stover, Jim Luceno, Summer Wood (aka "Wermo"), Lucia St. Clair Robson, and Abel G. Peña for their counsel and encouragement.